

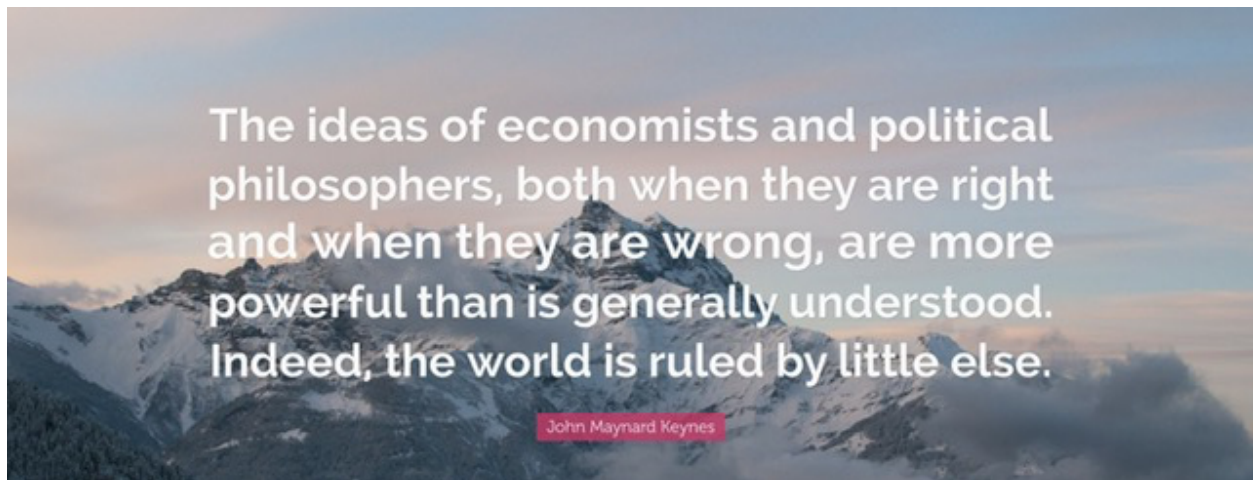
Foundations of Political Theory

(Fall 2023, 3 credits, TTH 11:30-1:00, Sage 4221)

Political Science 349 (no prerequisites)
Office Hrs: M 3-4:30; Th 1:30-3
or by appointment

Prof. David Siemers, Sage 4622
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Course Description: This course introduces some of the most important movements and thinkers in the history of political theory. Thus, this course deals with the “*classical period through [Thomas] Hobbes*” and goes beyond that to describe liberalism and its alternatives. It describes “*environmental influences on political philosophers; psychological factors* [behind their thinking, and] *clarification of concepts.*” Some of what you encounter will be familiar—it is a summary of how modern people have come to believe what they do; other ideas will be unfamiliar, and these ideas may prompt you to think about politics in new ways. Our class can’t treat political theory comprehensively, but it can give you a taste of what it is like and its impact, prompting you to reflect on what politics can and should be like.



Student Learning Objectives:

1. To promote critical analysis and creative thinking through careful consideration of various political theories (daily readings; in-class discussions).
2. To better understand the many alternatives offered by political theory (e.g. liberalism, conservatism, communitarianism), and its historical development through the study and understanding of important thinkers and their times.
3. To hone writing and oral communication skills (assigned papers and class discussions).

I encourage you to examine the PS department’s Student Learning Objectives found at: <https://politicalscience.uwosh.edu/wp-content/uploads/2016/10/Learning-Goals-2016.pdf>

Course Requirements and Grades:

There are five components to your grade and each of them will be worth 20%:

1. 6 Reading Reaction Papers (of eight opportunities)
2. Midterm Exam (October 12th)
3. Participation/Discussion
4. Term Paper (due November 9th)
5. Final Exam (December 14th)

You will get a standard letter grade for each of these (A, A-, B+, etc.). To calculate your final grade I use a standard scale (A=4.0, A-=3.7, B+=3.3 etc.), adding each score you earn, then dividing by the total number of assignments (five, at the end, obviously). Feel free to speak to me about your grade at any time. Keep in mind that grades are not a judgment of you personally or your value as a person. At all. They're simply an assessment of your level of mastery of a body of knowledge that you were likely entirely unfamiliar with before taking the class and some of the skills that you hone in college, like writing and public speaking.

Required Texts: There are two texts required for purchase: Plato's *Republic*, Allan Bloom's translation and Niccolo Machiavelli's *The Prince*, Harvey Mansfield translation.

Course Schedule and Reading Assignments

September 7 course introduction; syllabus; what is political theory?
reading: Miller, "Why do we Need Political Philosophy?"
(found on Canvas—all readings without a link here are posted to Canvas)

Liberalism

The History & Varieties of a Predominant Paradigm in Political Theory

September 12 liberalism—the predominant modern paradigm in political theory
reading: Harry Girvetz et al., "Liberalism" (Canvas)

September 14 liberalism, continued—the origins of liberalism
reading: John Locke's *Second Treatise on Civil Government* (excerpt from chs. 7-9)

September 19 first-generation, "negative liberty" liberalism
reading: John Stuart Mill, *On Liberty*, chapter 1

September 21 libertarianism: modern negative liberty liberalism
reading: Milton Friedman, "The Role of Government in a Free Society"

September 26 utilitarianism: the greatest good for the greatest number
reading: Jeremy Bentham: *Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation*

- September 28 modern utilitarianism
 reading: Stephen Nathanson, “Act and Rule Utilitarianism” Parts 1, 2, and 5
 View: Michael Green TedxTalk on the Social Progress Index, found at:
https://www.ted.com/talks/michael_green_what_the_social_progress_index_can_reveal_about_your_country?language=en
- October 3 modern “positive liberty” liberalism
 reading: UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights found at
<https://www.un.org/en/about-us/universal-declaration-of-human-rights>
 and Sam McFarland, “A Very Brief Overview of Modern Human Rights”
- October 5 multicultural liberalism
 reading: Will Kymlicka, *Politics in the Vernacular*, pp. 1-9 and 39-48
 (available as an eBook through Polk Library)
- October 10 the social contract as an ongoing theme in political theory
 reading: none
- October 12 **midterm exam**

Alternatives and Additions to Liberalism

- October 17 communitarianism—origins and development
 reading: Aristotle, *The Politics*
- October 19 modern communitarianism
 reading: Michael Sandel, “In Search of a Public Philosophy”
- October 24 philosophical conservatism
 reading: Michael Oakeshott, “Rationalism in Politics”
- October 26 Eastern karmic idealism and early Christian ethics
 readings: the edicts of Ashoka and First Letter from Paul to the Corinthians
- October 31 feminism, origins and variations
 reading: Mary Wollstonecraft, *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, Author’s
 Introduction, Dedication, and chapter 1
- November 2 ethic of care feminism
 reading: Virginia Held, *The Ethics of Care*, chapter 1, available as an eBook
 from the Polk Library website
- November 7 Marxism
 reading: none
- November 9 **Term Paper due**
 reading: none

Political Theorists for In-depth Consideration: Plato and Machiavelli

- November 14 Plato: what justice isn't
reading: *The Republic*, Book I
- November 16 Plato: the city in speech
reading: *The Republic*, Book II
- November 21 Plato: stories, myths, and leaders
reading: *The Republic*, Book III
- November 23 ***no class: Thanksgiving Break***
- November 28 Plato: justice as four "pillars of perfection"
reading: *The Republic*, Book IV; group 1 reaction paper
- December 2 Plato: the three "waves of paradox,"
reading: *The Republic*, Book V; group 2 reaction paper
- December 5 Niccolo Machiavelli: political leadership in revolutionary and settled contexts
reading: Machiavelli's *The Prince*, Dedicatory Letter and chapters 5-9, 11
- December 7 Machiavelli: on the reputation of political leaders
reading: Machiavelli's *The Prince*, chapters 15-19, 21, 25
- December 12 Machiavelli: what makes for successful popular governments
reading: *The Discourses on Titus Livy*, Book 1, chapters 4-5, 7-8
eBook found at: <https://www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/10827>
- December 14 **final exam**

Course Components

Participation/Discussion: Active participation by you, the students, is vital to the success of this kind of class. I encourage you to ask questions, make comments, follow-up on observations by me and by your peers, show yourself to be engaged and interested in the material we read, and explore connections between the ideas we read and the world we live in. All these are ways to actively participate and contribute positively to the class. Note that this grade is not for mere attendance. The point of any class is to learn—and that comes with the understanding that you aren't expert about it, but you are ready and eager to learn more. This is the best approach to take and it means not being a bystander in your own education.

Please inform me before class if you are ill and unable to attend and I will mark you excused. I may ask for documentation if there are multiple absences.

Exams: The first exam will be held on October 12th and the second on December 14th. The format will consist of a combination of multiple-choice questions, identifications of terms/names/concepts, and essay. These exams are open note in format (the notes must be your own) but not open book. Barring documented medical necessity or a University-approved absence, the exams must be taken on the day and time scheduled.

Term Paper: We are introduced here both to a predominant paradigm in modern political theory, liberalism, that has profoundly shaped the world, and to some alternatives or additions to it by people who have qualms about what it brings. Your assignment in this term paper is to intelligently discuss these ideas and take a well-reasoned position on them. You have two options:

Option 1: Which is the best version of liberalism and why is it better than the others? What are the potential drawbacks of this form of liberalism as a public philosophy that helps to shape modern politics?

Option 2: Which is the most important and viable critique of liberalism presented and why? Is this critique a “thick” or a “thin” critique of liberalism and what are the implications of your answer about this?

You are expected to reference and draw on some scholarship from political theory, with the understanding that you are to make your own argument. Suggested length for the final paper is 12 pages double-spaced and typewritten. Due November 9th.

Here is our tutorial on **writing in Political Science** that you should be familiar with:
https://uwosh.edu/politicalscience/wp-content/uploads/sites/14/2016/04/Writing_Tips.pdf

The **APSA Style Manual** is also an important reference. On pp. 37-41 it covers in-text citations and starting on page 42 it describes how to write bibliographical entries:
<https://connect.apsanet.org/stylemanual/>

Reading Responses: We will split up into two groups, one will write reading responses for Tuesdays and the other will write them for Thursdays. You will produce six reading reaction in eight total weeks, so you will choose two of the weeks below to skip writing.

The reaction should be approximately one full single-spaced page, three paragraphs in length. The first paragraph should be a summary of the reading; the second should feature a meaningful comment on the reading with an explanation of your comment; the third paragraph should ask a question that is prompted by the reading, one that you are genuinely curious about – not something you likely know the answer to, along with an explanation of why you are asking it. Each of these paragraphs should make it clear that you have read the assignment. The clearer that is, the better your assessment will be. When you refer to something in the text, please cite the page number.

	Tuesday writers	Thursday writers
Week Three:	Mill	Friedman
Week Four:	Bentham	Nathanson and Green
Week Five:	Universal Declaration/McFarland	Kymlicka
Week Seven:	Aristotle	Sandel
Week Eight:	Oakeshott	Ashoka and Paul
Week Nine:	Wollstonecraft	Held
Week Eleven	Plato, Book 1	Plato, Book 2
Week Fourteen	Machiavelli, early chs.	Machiavelli, later chs.

Papers will be graded either ++, +, 0, or – (this last grade is for papers not handed in)
 ++ a well-executed response that clearly shows you read the assigned material;
 + a moderately successful response that has a successful relation to assigned material,
 but is more brief and/or has some significant missteps in understanding
 0 a poorly executed response with little relationship to the assigned material

At the end of the semester I simply add up how many + you have and your grade is determined by that: A = 11 or 12; A- = 10; B+ 9; B = 8 etc. Hand reaction papers in on Canvas **by 8 AM the day of the class we will discuss them.** If you hand in your reaction after class you cannot receive a ++ grade.

Additional University and Course Policies

The term paper and both tests must be completed to pass the course. Term papers will be accepted beyond the due date, but will be docked a partial grade increment (B becomes B-) if late by one class period or less and by a full grade (B becomes a C) if late more than that. Barring documented medical necessity or a pre-approved University sanctioned event, the exams must be taken in class on the days scheduled. The notes that you use on the exams must be your own.

Electronics: Given the ample evidence that computer usage in the classroom harms academic performance, both for the user and the students around the user, electronics use *in the classroom* is by permission. If you use a laptop to access readings only, that's fine, use it. But if I find you distracted by the laptop or doing other things I will ask you to put your computer away.

Attendance: I do expect you to attend class and I do keep attendance. Let me know if you cannot attend for University-recognized reasons, like illness, quarantine, family emergency, religious holiday, or University-sanctioned events and I will mark you excused. I generally trust you, unless absences become chronic.

Political Science majors (and prospective majors): You should be taking Political Methodology (PS 245) in your sophomore year (or, if you cannot, in the first semester of your junior year at the latest). PS 245 is a prerequisite for our capstone course Political Analysis (PS 401) and cannot be taken concurrently with PS 245. You should save all your graded work from this class and the others in the major.

Office Hours: I will hold office hours in person, but I can also be reached on the digital platform Microsoft Teams. Teams is available to all UWO students. Find Teams by clicking on the 3 by 3 set of dots to the immediate left of the UWO banner toward the top left of your Outlook email. *The main point to remember is that I am available to you. Please use the office hours that professors provide. We are here to help.* If you have a schedule conflict with my office hours send me an email and we can work things out, including finding an alternative time.

Class Quality and Feedback: The Department of Political Science is committed to offering you a high-quality classroom experience, and we take your feedback very seriously. If you have concerns about anything related to this course, assignments, or teaching method, you are encouraged to first speak with me directly. If you are not comfortable speaking with me about something, you are welcome to speak with the Chair of the Department of Political Science, Dr. Tracy Slagter. She can be reached at slagtert@uwosh.edu. Should she be unable to resolve your concerns, she will guide you to appropriate resources within the College of Letters and Science.

Expectations for Academic Honesty: A college education is intended to develop your skills, knowledge, and confidence. Graded assignments are designed to work on these items. Thus, to gain the skills, knowledge, and confidence of a college-educated person all graded work is to be your own. When you are directed to work alone, an assignment or test must be done by you, its primary ideas are to be your own, and any outside materials should be dealt with properly (quoted when using someone's words, and cited when quoting or referencing them in any other way). When your teacher directs you to work in teams, the work is to be done by the team.

Two general rules should be kept in mind: all quoted and paraphrased material must be cited and when something is not common knowledge, you should have a citation. Plagiarism is using others' ideas without giving them credit. This includes using computer-generated text. Most plagiarism is inadvertent; some is intentional; some covers a small amount of text, others involve a whole paper. The more serious the incident, the higher the sanction is for this form of cheating, up to and including expulsion. More information can be found here: <https://uwosh.edu/politicalscience/wp-content/uploads/sites/14/2020/08/Academic-Honesty.pdf>

Disability Accommodations: It is the policy and practice of UW Oshkosh to create inclusive learning environments. If there are aspects of this course that result in barriers to your inclusion, please notify me as soon as possible. You are also welcome to contact Services for Students with Disabilities at 920-424-3100 or dean1@uwosh.edu. For more information, visit the Services for Students with Disabilities website at <http://www.uwosh.edu/deanofstudents/disability-services>.

Syllabus Changes: If any major changes are made to this schedule and these policies, I will announce them in a timely manner via your UW Oshkosh email account and make a revised syllabus available.

The following URL contains a description of students' consumer protection rights required by the Students Right to Know Act of 1990: <https://uwosh.edu/financialaid/consumer-information/>